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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000398

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SUBJECT: FORGING CLOSER US-EU COORDINATION IN GUINEA

REF: CONAKRY 379

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Kent C. Brokenshire for Reason 1.4 B/D

¶1. (C) Summary: During a July 6 meeting, Spain's Ambassador to Guinea told Charge he wished for closer EU/US coordination in dealing with the political impasse in Guinea. Ambassador Santos also noted the potential for greater coordination in EU/US assistance issues. He emphasized that Spain, which currently represents the Swedish EU Presidency, and will itself take on the Presidency in January, had been among the first EU countries to condemn the coup d'etat, and favored continued pressure on the CNDD to hold elections in 2009. He also called for a tougher line and greater engagement in Guinea by the ICG-G and its chairman Mohamed Chambas. Santos questioned the bilateral policies of France and China in Guinea, and suspects that both may be playing a double game.
End Summary

SPAIN AND THE EU PRESIDENCY

¶2. (C) Charge called on Spanish Ambassador Jesus Santos Aguado July 6 to discuss greater US-EU coordination in pressing the CNDD to commit itself to a timely election schedule. Santos said the previous EU Presidency represented by Germany had been slow to take a strong line following the coup d'etat and tended to soften any message of opprobrium, which the CNDD interpreted as tacit support for a lengthy transition. Santos approved of the clear, unambiguous line the US had taken against the coup from the outset, and noted that EU nations and the International Contact Group on Guinea (ICG-G) were now both coming around to this position as well (Reftel).

¶3. (C) Santos felt confident Spain would exert considerable influence in representing the Swedish presidency since Sweden had provided only vague outlines in setting its priorities in Guinea. These priorities included the promotion of democracy and stability. "We received nothing specific from Stockholm," said Santos. The Ambassador explained that instructions from Sweden on EU-related business would pass through Madrid, as would all EU-related material destined for Stockholm, thus giving Madrid the opportunity to weigh in on issues of concern. He added that Sweden was more interested in Baltic issues while Spain viewed West Africa as a priority, and had opened five new Embassies in the region in two years. "What this means is that Spain will essentially have the presidency in Guinea for a full year," said Santos, adding that the EU bureaucracy in Brussels would continue to handle routine matters.

PRESSING THE CNDD ON ELECTIONS

¶4. (C) Ambassador Santos said Spain fully favored a firm approach in pressing Chambas and the ICG-G to hold the CNDD to elections in 2009. He agreed that the sharp tone of the local contact group's June 19 communiqu expressing frustration over electoral progress had decisively swayed the ICG-G in Sirte, Libya, to issue an equally terse message June ¶27. This message urged, among other things, that the CNDD make a financial contribution to elections. Santos interpreted the CNDD's offer a few days later of \$3.2 million to Guinea's independent electoral commission as evidence that a clear, robust approach to the CNDD yields greater results than pliant, soft-pedaling diplomacy. "We will continue to push for an active international contact group," he said.

¶5. (C) Even with international support behind the effort, Santos views elections in Guinea as problematic. He pointed out that there were no strong political platforms, that the parties themselves are personality based and divided along ethnic lines, and that civil society is often weak and indecisive when it should be the bold vanguard of change. The country also has no tradition of separation of power. Most troubling to Santos is that after 50 years of oppression, Guinea's population has come to view its despotic state of affairs as normal, as a kind of comfort zone easier to endure than to change. "We need to be realistic about these things," he commented.

IMPROVING US-EU COOPERATION

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¶6. (C) He agreed that the US and EU should work closely in Guinea, particularly in coordinating efforts to press the CNDD for elections. Noting how the CNDD has attempted on occasion to play one country off on another he said, "We need to talk frequently and have a solid dialogue between us to make sure that we send no mixed messages." He affirmed the need to work out a common strategy prior to the July 16-17 ICG-G meeting in Conakry as the surest means of keeping that organization on a productive track in dealing with the CNDD. He also hoped to better coordinate US and EU assistance projects in Guinea to eliminate duplication. "We have a lot of things to discuss," he concluded.

CHINA AND FRANCE: ODD FELLOWS IN THE GAME

¶7. (C) Turning to other players in Conakry, Santos said he was suspicious of the Chinese and the French, and was unsure what game they were playing. He had heard rumors that the Chinese had offered CNDD president Moussa Dadis Camara a helicopter, and may have quietly provided the CNDD with \$10 million in funding. "If the CNDD is getting this kind of support from China, they will continue to stay in power," he concluded. Santos was aware that China had not extended any formal recognition to the junta, but added that members of the CNDD tend to greet the Chinese Ambassador with an enthusiasm and warmth that possibly reveal an undisclosed bilateral agenda. "I do not trust the Chinese Ambassador," he said.

¶8. (C) Santos also noted a perceived inconsistency in French diplomacy in Guinea. He pointed out that on one hand the French delegation at the AU summit in Sirte stated that France would not send any minister-level officials to Guinea to treat with the CNDD. On the other hand, according to Santos, the French Foreign Minister has offered to visit Conakry. "It's always hard to tell what the French are doing," said Santos. He added that while France may publicly adhere to the EU policy line concerning Guinea, it frequently has its own agenda which may be at odds with EU goals.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Spain's ascension to the EU presidency in Guinea, both as representing Sweden and in its own right, bodes well for increased EU-US coordination on political and assistance issues. Ambassador Santos clearly sees the need for a multilateral approach in dealing with the political crisis in Guinea, and views a strong partnership with the US as being a key element of this strategy, particularly in maintaining the ICG-G on a productive course. Spain's assumption of the EU Presidency marks a clean break with the previous EU approach under the direction of Germany which initially exercised a more appeasing attitude towards the junta, a factor that only changed in the last month after a lack of progress became undeniably evident.

¶10. (C) US Charge and Ambassador Santos have enjoyed a friendly relationship since serving together in Equatorial Guinea years previously. This may account for the unguarded nature of Santo's remarks concerning the policies of France and China in Guinea. Following the December coup, Santos was among the first Ambassadors in Conakry to advocate for a strong multilateral front in dealing with the junta; he has stuck to that line ever since. In representing the EU Presidency in Guinea, Santos is now in a strong position to realize this approach.

BROKENSHIRE